EXPECTATIONS, THEORY, AND GROUP PROCESSES*

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EXPECTATIONS, THEORY, AND GROUP PROCESSES

I am very pleased and honored to receive the 1991 Cooley-Mead Award. There are many reasons for this:

First, this award is a source of pleasure that I can share with my family, particularly with my wife, Theory. Theory has been there through all the steps and stages of my work for the last twenty-five years, and her support and confidence in that work have been of enormous importance to me as an individual and as a sociologist.

I am also pleased because I take this as an evaluation of not only of my work but also the work of a very large number of colleagues and co-workers. It is not possible for me to list the work of all those who have played active roles in expectation states research. I do want to mention, however, my three Stanford colleagues, Morris Zelditch, Jr., Bernard P. Cohen, and Elizabeth G. Cohen, who have been involved in the expectation states program from its earliest phases.

Finally, I am pleased by this award when I remember some of the others who have received the Cooley-Mead Award, such as Muzifer Sherif and Robert Freed Bales. These two social psychologists have strongly influenced my own work, and I am pleased to share in such an honor with them.

I developed my interest in sociology at a very early age -- certainly long before I appreciated the diversity that exists on so many different levels in this discipline. It is also the case

that very early in my career, I became interested in the study of interpersonal or group processes and I became intrigued as well with the idea of constructing theories of social behavior, in particular, theories that evolved, that developed, that grew. These two interests -- understanding interpersonal or group processes and constructing theories of social behavior that evolve -- have been with me my entire career and still continue to be major interests in my work. However, pursuing each of these interests, I have frequently found myself confronted with some of the most basic questions about the nature of interpersonal processes and also some of the most basic questions about what it means to speak of theories of social behavior that evolve and grow. Most often my colleagues and I have addressed these questions indirectly in that our answers have been embodied in our research. But on some occasions, we have dealt with these questions directly and explicitly. What I want to do here is to consider briefly what some of these basic questions are. More importantly, I want to discuss (1) what answers we have developed concerning the nature of interpersonal processes (and, more specifically, expectation state processes) and (2) some of the ideas we have developed about the development and growth of theories of social behavior. Following this, I want to share with you briefly some of my observations about the current state of theoretical work in the area of group processes.

It has always seemed to be obvious to me that understanding the operation of interpersonal or group processes should be one

of the central concerns in the sociological enterprise (not the only concern nor even the only central concern), but surely one of the central concerns. In a basic sense, the operation of group processes, aside from their significance in their own right, should be involved in explaining the existence of stable structures whether these structures are on the individual and on the social level.

This, of course, is not a new argument. But what exactly does this argument mean? What are interpersonal or group processes, and, in particular, expectation states processes? How are we identify them? More importantly, how should we as theorists conceptualize them? Also importantly, how can we use these processes to account for the existence of more stable structures on the individual and social level? Clearly, these are fundamental and even foundational questions, and there are those in sociology who would argue (and being sociologists would argue vehemently) that these are the kinds of questions that should be addressed and answered before one begins to actually construct theories of social processes. Now, whatever the merits of these arguments (and there are merits), they do not describe how we have come to construct our answers to these questions.

In fact, we started out with some very general meta-methodological and meta-theoretical ideas. These were commitments that have shaped the nature of our work from the outset. Among these were the ideas that you could isolate social processes, abstracting them out of complex situations of social

interaction; that you could formulate general and abstract theories of these processes, always starting with simple situations of very restricted scope and working toward highly complex situations; that you could formalize these theories in mathematical structures; and that the development of these theories is intimately involved with empirical tests, with applications, and with social interventions.[1]

Now, on the basis of these orienting ideas, which to us seemed noncontroversial (but as you know they are anything but noncontroversial in sociological social psychology), we went about the business of constructing theories of interpersonal processes, specifically the earliest versions of the status characteristics theory and the status value theory of distributive justice. In the process of constructing and reconstructing these and related expectation state theories -- and some of these theories like the status characteristics theory have evolved over periods of more than twenty years -- we have wrestled with the questions of what is a social process, in particular, an expectation states process, and more importantly, how should it be conceptualized?

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[1] These ideas were formulated in a very self-conscious and explicit manner by a group of sociologists at Stanford in the early sixties. This group included Bernard P. Cohen, Frank Camilleri, Sanford M. Dornbusch, W. Richard Scott, Morris Zelditch, Jr., and myself. We even had an acronym for these ideas. We called it the SAFE orientation -- Simple, Abstract, Formal, Empirical. So you see, there we were, a group of young Stanford sociologists who already in the early sixties were formulating an agenda for the practice of SAFE sociology.

What we wanted was a conception of expectation states processes that would make explicit the types of issues the theorist must address in formulating a specific theory. The conception in itself is not a theory but a metatheory or working strategy for formulating a set of theoretical questions. However, the answers to these theoretical questions, in terms of a specific set of concepts and principles, do constitute a specific theoretical formulation. In time, we arrived at the conception of an interpersonal or expectation states process as a state organizing process which I shall briefly review.

STATE ORGANIZING PROCESSES

In conceptualizing a state organizing process, we distinguish at the outset between the level of the social framework and that of the situation of action. A situation of action occurs within a social framework whose elements are trans-situational, more comprehensive, and more enduring than those in the action situation. The elements of the social framework may be cultural (encompassing norms, values, generalized beliefs, and social categories), formal (including institutionalized roles or formalized positions in authority structures), or interpersonal (as in enduring networks of sentiments, influence, and communication).

The social framework is an abstract concept, and it is not to be identified with a particular level of social order. Its

elements may be from a organizational structure within which the group operates, or from a relevant subcultural tradition, or even from the society at large. Further these elements are not treated as simply exogenous factors whose effect upon the process is to be assessed. Rather, they are treated as being actually involved in the process, just as status characteristics and referential structures are constitutive components of status and justice processes. As a consequence, the theorist's initial task is to describe in abstract terms those elements of the framework that are involved in the process under study. Further, under the assumption that these elements of the larger system are not always involved in the interaction, he or she has the additional task of formulating salience principles that describe when these elements are (or are not) significant to the actors.

An expectation process occurs within a situation of action in which activating events and conditions are important components. These events and conditions are the focus of the process; they are the goal states toward which the actors are oriented. In status characteristics theory, for example, they are the valued collective tasks that actors are motivated to solve. In conceptualizing these events (as well as the other conditions in the situation, such as the number and the types of actors involved and the history of the process), the theorist is describing the conditions under which the process is predicted to occur. These are the scope conditions of the theory that must be understood in order to carry out appropriate tests of the theory,

and to know how to further elaborate the theory. In this approach the actor is also abstractly conceived and can be interpreted to be an individual, an organization or even a nation-state.

Given these initial conditions, we assume that actors will organize the many items of information that can become salient (whether these are social, personal, or situational) and will engage in behaviors that are addressed to dealing with the activating events. The outcome of this process is the formation of states. These are our expectation states which are situationally stable structures that define the actors' relations to each other. The theorist's task at this stage is to formulate developmental principles, including information processing principles. These describe in specific terms how salient information is combined with the behaviors that are actually occurring in the situation to form states of self-other relations.

Once these states are formed they determine the subsequent behaviors of the actors to each other and with respect to the activating events. At this juncture, the theoretical task is to formulate principles that describe which behaviors are (and which are not) relevant to the self-other states, how these states specifically determine behaviors (the functional relations between states and behavior), and under what conditions these behaviors will maintain or will alter the states.

Given that an episode of the expectation process is

completed, we think of the process as being deactivated. When dealing with status processes, for example, this might mean that status distinctions and status relevancies become less significant, that the self-other states become latent, and that the power and prestige order, which depends on these states, actually becomes de-differentiated. Finally, with the completion of the process, there are trans-situational effects to be considered. These may be succession effects, as when the outcomes of one episode become inputs to a succeeding episode, or construction effects, as when the outcomes from one or more episodes actually produce changes in the social framework itself. Once more, the theorist faces the task of formulating principles that describe in specific terms the operation of these succession and construction effects.

I have a number of observations about this particular conception of an expectation state process as a social process.

First, while this type of framework is certainly not everyone's framework in sociological social psychology, it is not unique to the expectation states program. We see similar and related ideas in the work of Fararo and Skvoretz (1986) on what they call a theoretical method which they explicitly propose as a framework for the construction of theories of social processes. We see similar ideas in the formulation developed by Lawler, Ridgeway, and Markovsky (1990) for what they call a program for the development of a structural social psychology. We also see similar ideas developed by Sheldon Stryker (1987) in his

conception of a structural symbolic interactionism. I take this commonality of perspective to be a very positive development and to be an indication of the emergence of what I call the "new group process movement" in sociological social psychology. (I shall have more to say about that movement, shortly.)

Second, this framework enables me to spell out more fully what I mean by arguing that social psychology -- and, in particular, the study of group or interpersonal processes -- is central to the sociological enterprise. The initial focus in this approach is on understanding the nature of the social process: How and when is it activated? How does it evolve? What state structures are formed, and how do these state structures determine behavior? Also, how and when is the process deactivated? These are the initial theoretical questions with which we start. We assume that much social behavior and much of the variability of that behavior can be accounted for by understanding the operation in these terms of specific interpersonal or group processes.

But this approach also puts a heavy emphasis on understanding the different types of trans-situational outcomes of these processes. We assume that one of the major types of outcome of the operation of status, control, and affect processes, for example, is the assignment by actors to each other of different types of personality characteristics, where these personality characteristics can be of a performance, a moral, or an expressive nature. Thus in situations where different

processes occur and recur through time, persons are being constructed and reconstructed as social objects as a result of the operation of different group processes.

Also, we believe that the structures that emerge in one episode of a process can affect, under specified conditions, those that develop in subsequent episodes. Thus, for example, status expectations formed in one situation can become inputs to the status process in subsequent situations. By understanding these succession effects (say, how expectations are transferred from one to a second actor and from one situation to a second), we can account for the cross-situational consistencies in the individual's behavior while starting, as we do, from the perspective of a situationally specific theory.

Further, we believe that the operation of expectation state processes can lead to the creation of structures that become elements of the larger social framework. Thus, for example, through the operation of status processes, new status characteristics and new generalized beliefs may be created which become part of the actor's social framework.

More generally, the important argument here is that each of these outcomes of episodes of expectation states processes -- assigned personality characteristics, transferred expectations, constructed status characteristics or generalized beliefs -- becomes a major input to subsequent episodes and thus each is maintained or changed through the recurrent operations of the social process. It is through this kind of approach that we can

account for the existence of more stable structures on the individual and the social level by starting from the interpersonal or group process level. But this kind of approach can only be realized through specific theoretical formulations of the processes that are involved.

A third feature of this kind of conception of a social process is that it provides us with a set of standards to evaluate what already has been done and an agenda for future work, as Lawler and his colleagues have argued. Of the different formulations in the expectation states program the status characteristics theory has been most fully developed within the terms of a state organizing conception. (This is not surprising since work on the status characteristics theory has played an important role in developing this conception.) Be that as it may, in the case of status characteristics research we have a developed theory with a graph theoretical formalization of that theory (Berger et al. 1977). Further, this theory has been extensively tested and applied to different types of controlled experimental situations and to different types of open-interaction groups. The latter include temporary and short-term groups (with little or no prior histories), as well as enduring and relatively permanent groups (with extensive prior histories). As a result of recent work by Bernard P. Cohen (1991), Hamit Fisek and colleagues (1991), and James Balkwell (1991), the range of situations to which this theory is applicable has been significantly increased. (See also Gerber, 1989.) Furthermore,

the status characteristics theory has been the basis for an extensive program of social interventions research carried out by Elizabeth G. Cohen (1982) and her colleagues, and by Doris Entwisle and Murray Webster, Jr. (1974).

In addition to this work, there is status characteristics research on trans-situational outcomes. We now have both experiments and theory that describe how status expectations formed with respect to one actor in a situation are transferred to a second actor and to subsequent situations (Pugh and Wahrman 1983; Markovsky et al. 1984; and Berger et al. 1989). Further, we have research on diffusion processes by Barry Markovsky (1988) that describes how changes in expectations that are created in specific task situations can diffuse through a larger population and thus produce macrolevel changes. Most recently, we have a theoretical formulation by Cecilia Ridgeway (forthcoming) that describes how an initially nonvalued characteristic can acquire status value and generalized expectations as a result of the operation of ongoing status processes. Thus, this theory describes how new status characteristics are created which, in turn, become elements of an enduring and trans-situational social framework.

Clearly, other theories in the expectation state program are not as fully developed as those in the status characteristics branch. In addition, we have only just begun to construct state organizing theories for affect state processes and for processes of interpersonal control (Berger 1988). Still further down the

line are the challenging theoretical and empirical problems concerned with how different types of state organizing processes are interrelated. However, work on new expectation state theories and on the interrelation of social processes is already under way, particularly in the recent research of Martha Foschi (1989), Murray Webster, Jr. (1980), Janet Johnston (1988), and Robert Shelly and his colleagues (1989).

Thus, while we are clearly beyond the stage where the idea of a state organizing process is simply a programmatic conception, it still serves as an important framework in investigating new expectation state processes and the trans-situational outcomes of these processes.

Let me now turn to my interests in theory and theory growth.

NATURE OF THEORY AND THEORY GROWTH

My interests in the nature of theory and of theory growth are as old as any other interests in my career, and are reflected in the work (with others) on Types of Formalization in Small Groups Research (1962) and in the series on Sociological Theories in Progress, Volumes I, II, and III (1966, 1972a, 1989). In one way or another this work is concerned with such questions as: What is the structure of a theory? What do we mean by the growth and progress of a theory? What is the role of formalization in the development of theory?

Like many others who entered the field in the fifties and

sixties, my original ideas on the nature of theory were strongly influenced by the work of such people as Carl Hempel, Ernst Nagel, Karl Popper, and Steven Toulmin. However, confronted with the diversity of theoretical activities in our field, it soon became clear to me that, while we had much to learn from the work of these philosophers, there was much more that we would have to determine on our own if we were to make sense of the different types of theoretical research in sociology.[2]

By the early sixties in my lectures and courses, I already found it necessary to distinguish between orienting or theoretical strategies and unit theories as different types of theoretical products. But I knew that this picture was not complete. Our own work on expectation state processes suggested that theories could be developed in clusters which were more than unit theories and certainly different than orienting strategies. At that time, I was referring to these clusters as "parallel formulations" (Berger 1969).

The work of Imre Lakatos (1968, 1970) on research programs that began to appear in the late sixties and early seventies

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[2] This view about the need to develop concepts, methods, and tools for analyzing and constructing theories has been long shared by my colleagues and myself. Over the years it has led to research on a variety of issues in theory construction: on the role of formalization in theory building (Berger et al. 1962); on distinguishing generalizing and historical orientations (Berger et al. 1972b); on the idea of scope conditions (Berger 1974, and Walker and Cohen 1985); on the relations between experimentation and theory (Zelditch 1969); and on the use of multiple paradigms in theoretical research (Zelditch, 1979). See also B. P. Cohen (1989).

seemed to provide us with what we were missing in understanding different types of theoretical activities. In Lakatos' terms, theoretical research programs have "cores" and "auxiliary" components, they have "positive" and "negative heuristics," and one could speak of them as being "progressive" or "degenerative." But surely, so we reasoned, there is more to say about these programs, for whatever else they are, they are also complex structures of interrelated theories. But exactly how are the theories in these research programs interrelated? This is the problem that David Wagner and I started to work on in the early seventies.[3] Aside from distinguishing orienting strategies from unit theories, we wanted to describe the anatomy of programs from the standpoint of their growth. Obviously, theories within and between programs are interrelated in many ways, but which kinds of interrelations represent growth and development?

From this standpoint we have come to distinguish different types of relations between theories -- elaborations, proliferations, integrations, and variations -- that represent different types of theory growth. They also represent different types of goals and strategies that are available to the theorist in developing research programs. Elaborations are undertaken to increase the scope, the analytic power, and the empirical grounding of a unit theory within a given domain. Proliferations

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[3] Bo Anderson and Morris Zelditch, Jr., were also involved in the earliest stages of the "structures project" (as it was then called) and contributed to its development.

are constructed to apply and extend theoretical principles developed within one domain to a new and different domain. (With proliferations we establish new beachheads; with elaborations we exploit the high ground.) Variant theories and competing theories are constructed as ways to pit similar and dissimilar theoretical principles against each other through conflicting empirical predictions. Integrations are constructed to bridge different parts of a single program where the theoretical elements are from the same family of concepts and principles. They are also constructed to bridge the parts of different programs where the theoretical elements are from different families of concepts and principles. In the latter case, it is often necessary to translate competing programs into a third family of concepts and principles within which the integration is achieved. This is what is involved, for example, in Jasso's (1978) integration of exchange and status value arguments that has become part of her own distinctive theory of distributive justice. For more information on those types of growth, see Wagner and Berger (1985).

Throughout all this, our unit of analysis in understanding growth is the program itself. Later theories that build on earlier theories may replace them, but it is also the case that they may not completely replace the earlier theories. Therefore, the elements of earlier theories as well as the proliferates and the variants of some core formulation can continue to be components of a theoretical research program.

In our research on expectation states theories, on distributive justice theories, and on theories concerned with negotiation and conflict, we have identified different types of research programs and the different types of inter-theory relations involved in the growth of these programs.[4] Still there is much to be done to further develop our understanding of the structure of research programs and theory growth. The concepts and principles in our analytical scheme need to be further refined and extended. This will undoubtedly occur as we identify new theoretical research programs and as we examine their structure. But more is needed. Among other things, we need a much deeper understanding than we have at present of the role played by metatheoretical principles and working strategies (for example, the conception of a state organizing process). How do such metatheoretical strategies emerge from ongoing theoretical research? How do they undergo change? What role do they play in theory growth -- particularly in the proliferation of concepts and principles across substantive domains?

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[4] We have found few examples of the growth relation that Laudan (1976) refers to as "strict cumulativity." This is the idea that if one theory builds on and represents an advance over an earlier theory, the earlier theory should be formally derivable as a special case of the later theory. The fact that we find such few examples of this relation may be a peculiarity of theories in sociology and social psychology, or, as we suspect, that theory growth is a much more complex process than has been traditionally represented. In this connection, see also Kuokkanen (forthcoming), who concludes, on the basis of his analysis of different social psychological balance theories, that "there is no simple cumulative continuity among these theories."

We also need a much deeper understanding than we have at present of the role played by applications and social interventions in the growth of theory. It is certainly important to understand the role of traditional criteria like generality, analytic power, and empirical grounding in theory growth; however, it is also important, as Wagner, Zelditch, and I have argued, to understand the role of criteria that are specifically involved in applications and social interventions (Berger et al. 1985). We believe that the commonality of a process described by a theory, its instrumentality or utility in effecting social change, and its dominance over competing processes in complex social situations are all important applications and interventions criteria. These criteria can determine the acceptance of one program over a second, and thus they can affect the success and growth of a given program. We need a much deeper understanding of these matters.

In the first instance these ideas on theory and theory growth were developed to make sense of our own work and also to give that work direction. But from the beginning, we assumed that there were other major theoretical research programs being developed in our field, and that we could use our analytic scheme to identify these programs, to analyze their structure, and to provide the researcher with concepts and principles that he or she could use in developing his or her program. What is of particular interest is that some of the best examples of theoretical research programs in sociology are to be found in the

work of those currently doing research in what I have referred to as the "new group process movement." I want to conclude my remarks by sharing with you some of my observations about this new group process movement.

GROUP PROCESSES

Within the past few years we have witnessed, I believe, the emergence (or reemergence) of what can be called the new group process movement: social psychologists in sociology who are concerned with research and theory on interpersonal or group processes and structures. It is not so much that this movement has just developed -- in fact it has very deep roots in our field -- as that it has recently become more aware of itself as a significant group in sociological social psychology.

There are many things that impress me about the work that is being done by those who are part of this new group process movement, but what is perhaps most striking is the theoretical research in this area. There is enormous concern with and sensitivity to the problem of developing theories of interpersonal processes, theories of interactor processes. But there is much more here than simply a concern for and sensitivity to theory. (Concern for and sensitivity to theory are common enough in sociology.) In fact, there are major efforts underway to construct general and abstract theories of interpersonal and interactor processes. Let me just mention a few of these, as

examples (and I apologize beforehand to all those I have not listed).

Aside from the ongoing research in the different branches of the expectation states program, there is the research program on exchange and power and dependence processes that was initiated by Richard Emerson (1972a, 1972b) and is continued in the work of Karen Cook (1982), Linda Molm (1991), Toshio Yamagishi (1987) and their colleagues; there is the extensive theoretical and empirical research on distributive justice processes by Guillermina Jasso (1989), Barry Markovsky (1985), John Stolte (1987), and others; there is the research program that is being developed by David Willer (1987) and his colleagues on a theory of elementary social relations; there is the research program on conflict and bargaining processes that is being developed by Edward Lawler (1986) and his colleagues; there is the theoretical and experimental research on legitimation processes by Morris Zelditch, Jr. and Henry Walker (1984), Cecilia Ridgeway (1989), and others; there is the research program on the affect control theory that was initiated by David Heise (1979) and is continued in the work of Lynn Smith-Lovin and Heise (1988), Neil MacKinnon (MacKinnon and Keating 1989) and their colleagues; there is the research program on power structures in groups by Louis Gray and his colleagues (1976); there is the research by Jonathan Turner (1988) on a general theory of micro processes; and there is the theoretical research by Tom Fararo and John Skvoretz (1986) on the unification and integration of different research programs.

And there are many others.

Most of this work occurs within the framework of theoretical research programs that have been developed over periods of ten, fifteen, twenty, and in some cases over twenty-five years. Emerson's first article in the power-dependence program, for example, was published in 1962. Heiss' first article in the affect control program was published in 1969, and the expectation states program was started in the late 1950s (see Berger 1958). Clearly, these are sustained programs, representing long-term commitments. Perhaps, of greatest significance is that in most of these programs there has been growth in theoretical and empirical knowledge as we currently understand these ideas of growth. In my opinion, the work being done on general and abstract theories in this area is one of the most promising developments in our field.

It is certainly not the case, in any sense, that the task of developing theoretical knowledge of interpersonal and interactor processes has been realized. But we have started on that task. Furthermore, the fact that these programs exist provides the strongest possible answer (if one is still needed) to the question of whether it can be done.

All in all, I think that this is a very exciting time to be working in the area of group processes, interpersonal processes, interactor processes. The unsolved problems are there, and there are certainly plenty of them. The theoretical research programs that have been developed are, in Thomas Kuhn's sense, important

exemplars for our work. And at least in general terms we know what kind of theoretical, empirical, and applied knowledge about group processes that we want to construct. The challenge now to us is to get on with that task.

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